



AP FILE PHOTO

Phil Hoff passes away at 93

By WILSON RING
Associated Press

MONTPELIER, Vt. (AP) — Former Democratic Gov. Philip Hoff, who's credited with starting Vermont's transition from one of the most Republican-entrenched states in the country to one of the most liberal, has died. He was 93.

Hoff, who became the first Democrat elected governor of Vermont in more than 100 years in 1962, died on Thursday, accord-

ing to The Residence at Shelburne Bay, where he had been living.

"Philip Hoff forever changed the state of Vermont," said Steve Terry, a former journalist who helped write a biography titled "Philip Hoff: How Red Turned Blue in the Green Mountain State." "His influence in the 1960s has molded and created the Vermont many of us know today."

During his six years in office, Hoff

helped start a process that evolved into the state's environmental movement. He focused on reducing pollution and cleaning up the state's rivers and streams.

He also emphasized education reform and helped revamp the state's judicial system.

Hoff's policies helped refocus state government on meeting the needs of residents, a philosophy embraced by his Republican successor, Deane C. Davis.

The office has alternated between Democratic and Republican governors since Hoff was elected.

But at the mid-point of the 20th century, Vermont remained one of the most Republican states in the country. The state was dominated by a couple of political families, but Hoff shook up the staid Vermont political structure.

He became governor when the state was under a federal court mandate to reapportion the state House, where each of the state's 241 cities and towns were represented by a single person, no matter the community's population.

"The people of Vermont have clearly said that they don't want to continue with the old ways, and if we fail to respond to forces at work in our society, we face a bleak future," Hoff said at his 1963 inaugural address.

"I loved it any time he came into the office because there was a sense of vibrancy and life," said U.S. Sen. Patrick Leahy, who joined Hoff's Burlington law firm after graduating from law school in 1964. Two years later, Hoff appointed Leahy as Chittenden County state's attorney, a post he held for eight years, until his 1974 election to the U.S. Senate.

"I'd see the governor all the time," Leahy said. "I was the star-struck young lawyer in his office. I'd see

people staying in the halls, just waiting to say hi to him. We'd have meetings with him. It was exciting."

In a statement issued Friday, Leahy praised his former mentor as a visionary leader, calling him "a trailblazer, a reformer and a transformative influence in both Vermont and on the national stage. He was an example of political courage to so many of us. Even his Kennedy-esque style was something new and fresh."

"He had no patience for finger-to-the-wind politics," said Leahy. "He put people first, and he modernized education, the judicial system and Vermont's economic vitality in ways that have made lives better for generations of Vermonters. He was an early voice of opposition to the Vietnam War, at a time when the war was still popular."

Rep. Peter Welch, who drew on Hoff's support during his first run for the House of Representatives, said Friday, "Vermont and the nation lost a giant yesterday evening. As our first Democratic governor in 1962, Phil Hoff was a groundbreaking leader in Vermont politics. He was a kind and decent man who cared deeply about our state and those less fortunate. He was a passionate and lifelong champion for social and economic justice and an early civil rights leader. Governor Hoff

became a national voice of conscience in his courageous opposition to the Vietnam War, grounded in his distinguished military service as a member of the Greatest Generation."

Although he did not know Hoff personally, Gov. Phil Scott expressed his condolences to the family Friday morning and spoke of Hoff during a visit to St. Albans. Scott praised the former governor for his service to both the state and the nation. Mutual friends have told him Hoff was "very gracious and very kind," said Scott.

Hoff's legacy lives on, Sen. Bernie Sanders said Friday. Phil Hoff was one of the great governors in Vermont history and one of the leading progressives of his era," Sanders said. "History will remember him as a man of great courage who not only helped transform Vermont but was years ahead of his time in the fight for economic, social and racial justice."

Philip Henderson Hoff was born on June 29, 1924, in Turners Falls, Massachusetts. He took time off from Williams College to serve in the Navy during World War II and returned to Williams after the war. He graduated and went on to law school at Cornell University before moving to Burlington in 1951.

Hoff first ran for office in 1958 for a seat on

the Burlington Board of Aldermen. He was defeated.

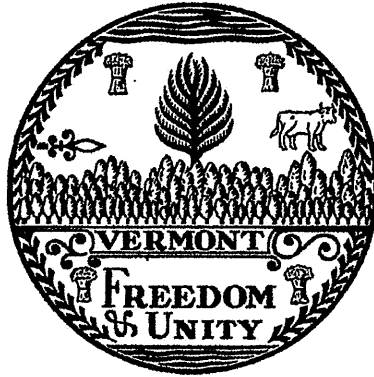
Two years later, he was elected to the Vermont House after running what Terry called "a minimalist campaign." He had no campaign literature of his own and instead handed out brochures promoting the presidential candidacy of U.S. Sen. John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts.

After one term in the Legislature, Hoff won the race for governor in 1962 after he campaigned on the need for change and to end 100 years of one-party rule.

Locally, Hoff was closely allied with the Handy family, particularly brothers Floyd and Larry, a friendship that remained even after he was out of office.

Hoff was briefly considered as a vice presidential candidate in 1968 but withdrew his name when it became clear his friend, Sen. Edmund Muskie of Maine, was being considered. Hoff ran for the U.S. Senate in 1970, but lost to the incumbent GOP Sen. Winston Prouty. Hoff returned to the Legislature in 1982 after being elected to the state Senate. He served three, two-year terms.

Messenger editor Michelle Monroe contributed to this report.



Articles of Interest

Feds sending \$2M more for state addiction programs

By Mike Maher

Apr 30 2018, 10:33 PM

RICHMOND – Vermont's efforts to combat the opioid epidemic are getting a \$2 million boost from the federal government.

The additional funding, announced Monday by U.S. Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., will expand state programs like drug disposal, prevention training and peer coaching for those in recovery.

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Leahy said the [recently approved](#) 2018 federal omnibus appropriations bill also includes funding increases for law enforcement's anti-heroin work, for opioid programs in rural communities, and for pregnant women and new mothers struggling with addiction.

Officials said that list illustrates both the need for funding and the diversity of potential solutions.

"We're at a transition point in the opioid epidemic," said Dr. Richard Bernstein, a Richmond Rescue member who helped start the town's opioid task force a few years ago. "We have many of the needed structures in place, but people are still dying, and people are still overdosing. And we're not going to be able to solve this problem in one way."

Vermont is pumping funding into initiatives like the [hub and spoke](#) medication-assisted program and statewide distribution of the overdose-reversal drug naloxone.

But there's not enough money to go around, as evidenced by a [recent commitment](#) to allocate \$14 million in tobacco industry settlement funds to opioid programs as well as a [proposal to tax](#) manufacturers of prescription opioids.

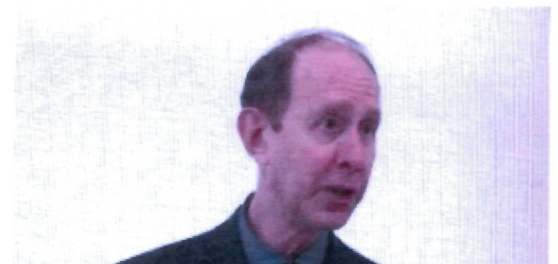
So state officials say Leahy's announcement, delivered Monday at Richmond's town office, provides some much-needed help. Leahy said Vermont will get at least \$4 million from the federal government's State Opioid Response Grant Program — double last year's appropriation.

It is "funding that will make a very real difference — a life-and-death difference for our friends, neighbors and loved ones who struggle with substance-use disorders," state Health Commissioner Mark Levine said. "It will have an impact on the prevention front, as well."

Levine said the grant funding will be used in a variety of ways, including the expansion of disposal options for unused prescription opioids, which Levine called "Vermont's most-dangerous leftovers."

That's already happening via disposal sites and events like last weekend's ["drug take back" day](#). But Levine said there's a need for more.

"We'll be able to purchase the materials needed to expand the number of drug-disposal kiosks in pharmacies and other locations around the state and make this process far more convenient and routine," he said.



The money will also go toward strengthening the state's programs for those in recovery and enhancing prevention strategies like training and screenings.

One example is a 40-hour substance-abuse training "that will be free to all prevention, intervention, treatment and recovery professionals," Levine said.

And a peer-recovery support program will be expanded to "several more hospital sites," Levine said. "Peer recovery coaches will be on site in emergency departments to work with individuals before they're released from the hospital to offer recovery supports and resources."

Levine said the federal money also will "support people in finding and maintaining employment, which will reduce the chances of relapse" during recovery from addiction.

Leahy, who is vice chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, said he pushed hard to increase funding for the Opioid Response Grant Program and other federal programs geared toward opioid addiction.

The senator said he hears about the need from communities like Richmond and from distraught parents who stop him on the street.

"We need help," Leahy said. "I thought we had some drug problems when I was state's attorney. It was nothing like we face today."

He touted other addiction funding in the 2018 federal omnibus bill. For example, there is \$130 million in a new program targeting rural communities that are deemed "at risk" for substance use disorder.

"Small towns – I don't care if it's in rural Iowa or rural Vermont – it's harder, more difficult, more expensive to reach them," Leahy said. "We have to have a special program for that."

Leahy also discussed a \$22 million nationwide increase in the Anti-Heroin Task Force program. Vermont has gotten \$2.7 million in task force grants since the program's inception in 2014, Leahy's office said.

Col. Matthew Birmingham, who commands the Vermont State Police, said that money has enhanced the state Drug Task Force's efforts to track and arrest traffickers bringing heroin and other opiates into the state for sale.



Health Commissioner Mark Levine speaks during a press conference on Vermont's response to the opioid crisis on Monday, April 30, 2018. Photo by Mike Faher/VT Digger



Birmingham cited a significant jump in the number of opiate investigations since the federal funding arrived, aided by the addition of more troopers and an analyst. One long-term investigation centering on Orleans County resulted in 150 controlled-drug purchases and 65 arrests.

"I can say unequivocally that this money ... has been incredibly important to our mission in targeting heroin traffickers and fentanyl traffickers," Birmingham said. "It has also been very important for us in targeting drug diversion, as well."



Col. Matthew Birmingham, the Vermont State Police commander. Photo by Mike Faher/VTDigger

Leahy also discussed a \$10 million increase in national funding for programs designed for pregnant women and new mothers who are struggling with addiction. That includes a \$4 million pilot program based on the Vermont work of the KidSafe Collaborative and the Children and Recovering Mothers team.

Dr. Anne Johnston, a neonatologist with the University of Vermont Medical Center, said the latter program – known as the CHARM team – has made a difference by providing earlier prenatal care and medication-assisted treatment for expectant mothers who have substance-use issues.

“I think we’ve certainly made a lot of headway in this population in terms of assuring that women are in treatment earlier in their pregnancy and have healthier pregnancies and healthier babies,” Johnston said.

But measuring results is notoriously difficult in the midst of the opioid epidemic.

Levine noted that Vermont’s number of [opioid-related overdose deaths](#) climbed in 2017, but at a much slower rate than officials had been seeing. And he said there are “little to no waiting lists” at the state’s hub sites for medication-assisted treatment.

But he calculates that, for every person in addiction treatment, there could be seven or eight who have not sought treatment.

“If you do the math, we think there could be 20,000 to 30,000 people (who have opioid use disorder in Vermont),” Levine said. “But we don’t know that. We hope it’s not that high.”

On a much smaller scale, Richmond residents took the town’s addiction problems into their own hands a few years ago by organizing a local task force. The organization, with help from state funding, undertook initiatives like a needle exchange, needle-collection boxes and a prescription drug disposal program.

Michael Chiarella, Richmond Rescue’s director of operations, said he’s seen a decrease in the amount of naloxone his medics are administering for overdoses. But he’s not yet ready to attribute that to the town task force’s efforts.

“Is there a direct relation? We can’t answer that,” Chiarella said. “We’ll see.”



Dr. Anne Johnston, a neonatologist with the University of Vermont Medical Center. Photo by Mike Faher/VTDigger

Paid family leave bill passes out of key Senate committee

By Kelsey Neubauer

May 1 2018 5:55 AM

A paid family leave bill could come to the floor of the Senate as the legislative session winds down.

The Senate Committee on Economic Development passed H.196 on Monday in a 4-1-0 vote.

The panel amended the House version of the bill. The new draft expands the length of leave time, while decreasing the amount paid out to employees caring for family members by 10 percent. The program is funded through a 0.141 percent payroll tax.

The [draft](#) legislation features a 12-week combined paid parental leave and six-week paid family care with 70 percent wage replacement. The House [plan](#) included an 80 percent wage replacement and a six-week paid leave, six-week unpaid parental leave plan.

In addition, the committee's draft of the bill expands eligibility to include anyone who has made more than \$10,710 at a company in the 12 months prior to the leave.

The votes were split along party lines. The committee's one Republican member, Sen. David Soucy, R-Rutland, said he could not vote for the bill because it would increase tax and fees, a hardline for Republicans this session set by the governor. Soucy was appointed by the governor earlier in the session to replace Kevin Mullin, who is now the director of the Green Mountain Care Board.



Sen. David Soucy, R-Rutland, voted against the bill. File photo by Alan J. Keays/VT Digger

The bill, which was a main priority for the House this biennium, is set to go before the Senate finance and appropriations committees before it will be taken up on the Senate floor.

Senate Finance will analyze start-up costs for the program. According to an outside consulting agency, P&C Software Services, the exact start-up costs depends on a series of questions that have not yet been answered.

In an April 14 [memo](#), P&C estimated it would cost about \$10 million to \$15 million in state funds to launch the program.

"The difficulty in preparing an estimate for PFL system costs arise from the fact that there is currently no clarity on which functions are required or optional, and of those functions which would be performed by an IT system and which would be performed by staff," wrote Daniel Smith of P&C.

The state would collect about \$15.9 million for the paid leave benefit annually and the program would cost \$1.2 million a year to administer, according to a 2017 Vermont Joint Fiscal Office fiscal note.

Moving forward, advocates of the bill say it has the votes to pass both committees and the entire Senate but faces a gubernatorial veto.

Gov. Phil Scott has said he will veto any bill that increases taxes and fees, and in a March 20 [letter](#) to legislators, he specifically said he [does not support](#) a mandatory paid family leave program.

The bill passed the House and was the source of controversy between the House and Senate earlier in the session, when House members said that Senate Pro Tem Tim Ashe, D/P-Chittenden, did not support the bill.

Ashe told a constituent in an email at the beginning of the session that he thought paid family leave would be better when funded on the national level and disagreed with the regressive tax funding the bill, but he also said he could not think of a better way to fund the program.

If Vermont were to pass the bill, it would be the sixth state to offer paid family leave in the country — with wage replacement being the highest in the nation.

Vermont

Paraeducators fight for cheaper health care

Nicole Higgins DeSmet
Burlington Free Press
USA TODAY NETWORK

Burlington's paraeducators will attempt on Tuesday get a better health care deal, but they face strong headwinds out of Montpelier.

The paraeducators head into a fact-finding session hoping to nail down a health care contract. Their effort comes in the middle of a education cost crack-down by Gov. Phil Scott's administration that directly targets health care and education support staff.

Paraeducators are part-time staff who also happen to work with some of the districts most vulnerable students.

"I basically work for health care," Sherrie Hiller, a parent and paraeducator, said at the April 10 School Board meeting. A handful of educators and a few parents tried to explain to the community in attendance the situation support staff occupy within the district.

Hiller and paraeducator Michelle Clark revealed that they pay 80 and 65 percent of their salaries toward the \$14,404 cost of their health plans, respectively.

"Is that livable? is that sustainable?" Clark said of her take-home pay, which she estimated to be \$116 per week.

Hiller said she loved her job and she was sure she made a difference.

Gov. Phil Scott's spokeswoman, Rebecca Kelley, wrote in a Thursday statement that having contracts from every separate school district in Vermont is a factor in the growing education budget shortfall in the state. A coming hike in health care costs would only exacerbate the problem, she said.

Kelley wrote that \$26 million could be saved each year by transitioning to one statewide health benefit contract for school employees. Kelley argued the plan could still help to lower statewide property tax rates.

The National Education Association

Health care premium talks

District offer vs. Union counter

Single

District: Employee pays 10 percent

Union: Employee pays 7 percent

Two person

District: Employee pays 52 percent

Union: Employee pays 45 percent

Family

District: Employee pays 58 percent

Union: Employee pays 45 percent

Salary

District: The district offered paraeducators a 2 percent raise

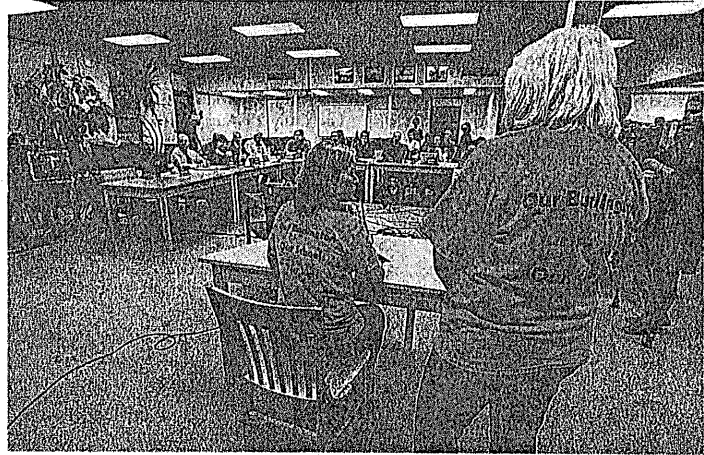
Union: The union countered with 4 percent.

of Vermont has negotiated contracts across Vermont. Chittenden County contracts kept to the state's recommended premium split — with districts covering 80 percent of premium costs for the upcoming fiscal year.

A parent's point of view

A Burlington mother of a daughter with special needs described to the community and the School Board on April 10 how paraeducators help students like her daughter achieve in regular classrooms.

"Paraeducators and interventionists are absolutely where the rubber meets the road in making sure our support services are as effective as they can be," Burlington mother Kelly Brooks said of the



Michelle Clark, seated, and Sherrie Hiller, pre-school para-educators at Flynn Elementary School, speak during the first meeting of the newly-constituted Burlington School Board on April 10. GLENN RUSSELL/FREE PRESS

role support staff plays in coordinating individual learning and education plans.

Having a paraeducator help her daughter allowed for a more focused encouraging learning environment for all the other students in the class as well, she said.

Here's where the contract negotiations left off in December 2017, according to the district website.

Other concerns

Gov. Phil Scott on Monday called the education system in Vermont "incredibly inefficient." And cited as evidence the fact that the student population in Vermont has decreased in the last twenty years while teaching staff had not decreased in proportion.

The student enrollment in Chittenden County, which carries one quarter of Vermont's student population in the entire

state, has held steady from 2006 to 2016.

Scott administration floated an idea last week to pressure schools to reduce staff or face a tax penalty by fiscal year 2020. The proposed penalty would trigger an increase in education spending leading to a higher homestead property tax.

Paraeducators are one of the targets for reduction under the proposal. An estimated 560 paraeducator positions could be cut across Vermont out of a total of approximately 938 jobs over the next five years, according to education finance manager for the Agency of Education Brad James.

The next special School Board meeting was warned Monday for 6 p.m. Tuesday at Hunt Middle School. This is separate from the mediation. The board is scheduled to meet with communication consultant, Michael Healy, regarding governance practices at 7 p.m.

Vermont

Are lawmakers moving too fast after Fair Haven?

April McCullum
Burlington Free Press
USA TODAY NETWORK

MONTPELIER — The alleged school shooting plot in Fair Haven has sent shock waves through Vermont politics, giving unprecedented momentum to gun restrictions and motivating new changes to criminal law.

In 1981, a rape and murder case in Essex Junction prompted an overhaul of Vermont's juvenile law. At a special session of the Legislature, lawmakers moved quickly to allow juveniles to be tried in adult court.

Sen. Dick Sears has spent the last several years working to undo some of that work, he recalled on the Senate floor. As lawmakers hurry to respond to an alleged school shooting plot in Fair Haven, Sears worries about going too far.

If Vermont dramatically overhauls its laws after Fair Haven, Sears wondered aloud on the Senate floor, how will those decisions look 25 years from now?

Any changes could not apply to the Fair Haven case, but could make it easier to intervene and prosecute potential mass shooters in the future.

Gov. Phil Scott has called for quick action, and leading lawmakers have made the bills a priority. But with less than two

weeks remaining in the legislative session, some observers have questioned the wisdom of quick changes to criminal laws.

"Why the need to rush about this case, if it can't be applied to this case?" asked Rep. Kurt Wright, R-Burlington, at a recent Republican caucus meeting.

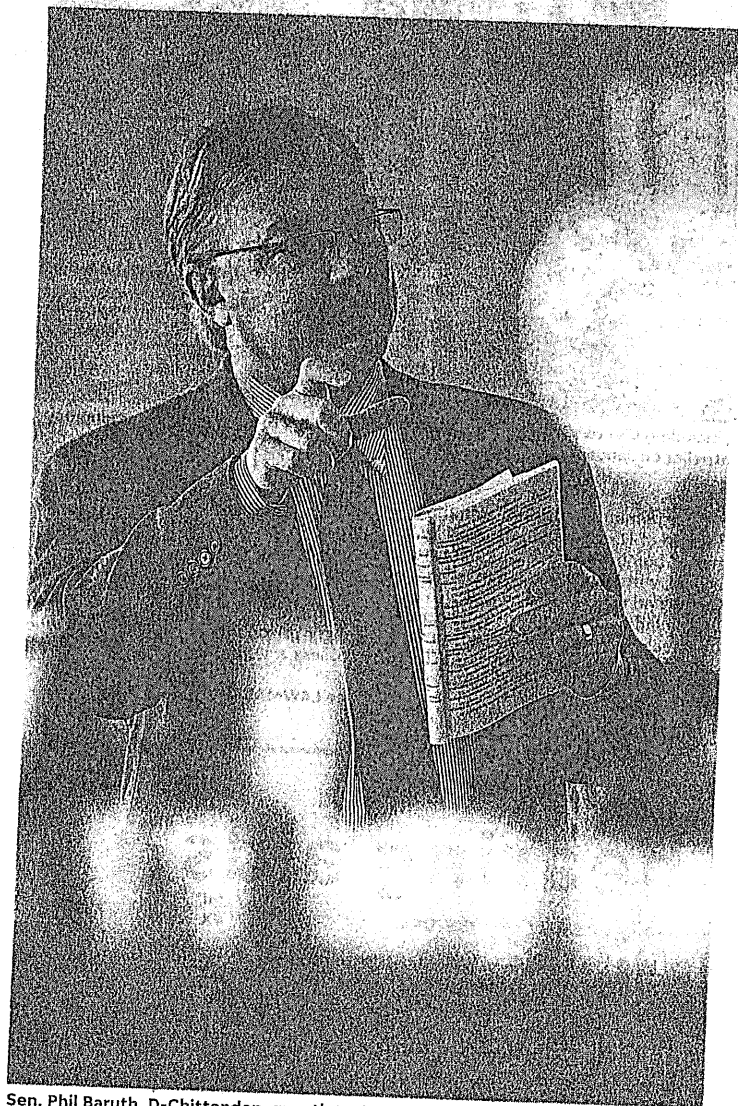
"It's worth it to take the time to get it right, especially when we're talking about crime," said Chloe White, policy director for the American Civil Liberties Union of Vermont.

Supporters argue that it's important to pass laws this spring, rather than waiting until a new legislative session begins in January.

"If we don't act now, we take a risk that something else could happen," said House Judiciary Committee Chairwoman Maxine Grad, D-Moretown. "These school shootings or these incidents that do put communities in absolute terror and absolute fear are unfortunately very commonplace, and so I think we do need to act."

Here are some of the ways Legislature is trying to block future violence — from the first warning signs of a crime to the moment when a person attempts to carry it out:

See **LAWMAKERS**, Page 4A



Sen. Phil Baruth, D-Chittenden, questions Sen. Dick Sears, D-Bennington, not pictured, as Sears explains a bill redefining the term domestic terrorism at the Statehouse in Montpelier on April 24. GLENN RUSSELL/FREE PRESS

Vermont

Lawmakers

Continued from Page 3A

When there's a potential for violence

Legislators tried to stop violent crime before it happens with the new "extreme risk" law. Vermont now allows prosecutors to obtain a court order to remove a person's guns for up to six months, or up to 14 days in emergency situations, if the person shows warning signs for violence or suicide.

The first extreme risk protection order has taken effect against Jack Sawyer, the suspect in the Fair Haven case, and prevents him from having a gun for six months.

When a person seeks to buy a gun

People with a criminal history may find it more difficult to buy a gun in Vermont after the passage of a new law that requires background checks on nearly all gun transfers, including private sales.

The efficacy of the law depends on sellers choosing to comply and firearms dealers agreeing to facilitate the background checks. It's too soon to know how the new law is working.

People younger than 21 years old now need to take a hunter safety course before they can purchase a gun. (Police say the 18-year-old Sawyer bought a shotgun



Leaders of the House Judiciary Committee, including Chairwoman Rep. Maxine Grad, D-Moretown, speak on the opening day of the legislature at the State House in Montpelier on January 3. GLENN RUSSELL/FREE PRESS

in Vermont in February.)

If a person threatens violence

The Senate is also working to beef up penalties in the state's existing law against criminal threatening, which passed after Jody Herring killed three family members and a state social worker in central Vermont.

The Senate Judiciary Committee's version of H. 675 would specifically penalize bomb and firearm threats at a school, with penalties up to five years in prison and a \$5,000 fine.

The bill would also allow prosecution of threats even if they are not directly communicated to the target of the threat. The full Senate has not yet voted on the bill.

If a person brings a gun onto school property

It's already illegal to bring a gun into a Vermont school building or school bus.

House lawmakers have proposed longer prison sentences for people who possess a gun on school property with

See **LAWMAKERS**, Page 5A

Lawmakers

Continued from Page 4A

the intent to injure another person. The crime would be punished with up to three years in prison, rather than two years.

If a person has a gun and intends violence

Lawmakers are taking another look at one of the misdemeanor charges being used in the Fair Haven case. Sawyer has been charged with carrying a dangerous or deadly weapon with the purpose of in-

juring another person. He has pleaded not guilty to the charge.

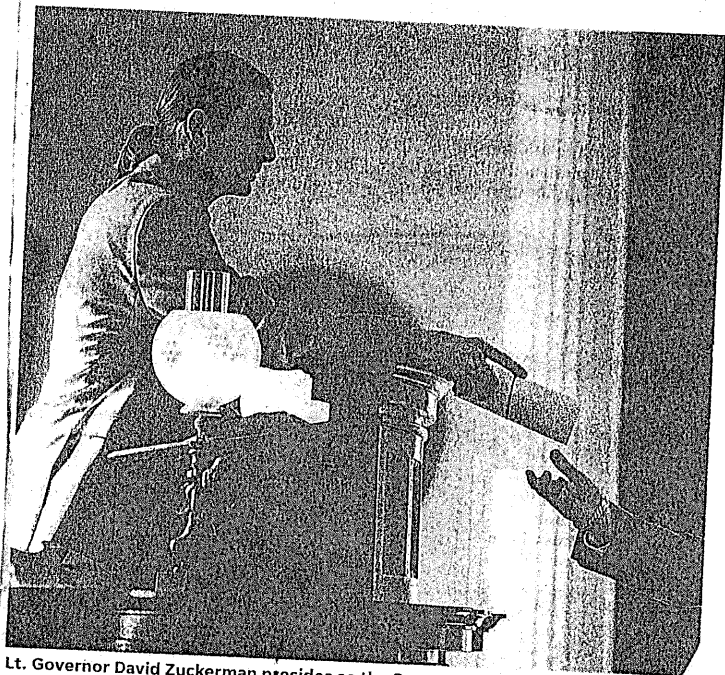
The Senate voted unanimously to expand the law so that a person would not have to be physically carrying a dangerous weapon for police to intervene. The new version of the law would also outlaw possession of a dangerous weapon in

conjunction with a violent intent.

"It allows police intervention earlier," said Robert Sand, a former prosecutor and a professor at Vermont Law School.

The bill would also increase the potential financial penalty to \$2,000, up from

See **LAWMAKERS**, Page 5A



Lt. Governor David Zuckerman presides as the Senate considers a bill redefining the term domestic terrorism at the Statehouse in Montpelier on April 24.

GLENN RUSSELL/FREE PRESS

Lawmakers

Continued from Page 5A

\$200, in addition to two years in prison. It would become a felony to possess a dangerous weapon with the intent to injure multiple persons, with penalties up to 10 years in prison and a \$25,000 fine.

If a person terrorizes multiple people

The Senate voted unanimously to create a new crime of "domestic terrorism," which could be punished with up to 20 years in prison and a \$50,000 fine. Domestic terrorism will include "knowingly and willfully" taking "substantial steps" to cause death or serious bodily injury to multiple people, or threatening any civilian population with mass destruction, mass killings or kidnapping.

Sen. Sears, who worked on the bill, said it would hold people "accountable for their behavior."

Gov. Scott and Rutland County State's Attorney Rose Kennedy have been frustrated by the state's inability to prosecute Sawyer for felony crimes, and the governor supports the Senate's work.

"The mere possibility that someone with a clear intent to murder innocent children could be back on the street shows there is an unacceptable loophole in our current criminal law," Scott said in an April statement.

Chloe White, of the ACLU-Vermont, argues that the Legislature needs to take more time before passing the bill.

"I don't think adding a new crime is going to do anything," White said. "It's just going to enhance a sentence."

If a person takes steps toward a serious crime

The final bill being considered in the House of Representatives would redefine attempted murder, attempted aggravated murder and six other serious violent felonies.

Under the bill, a person could be convicted of an attempted crime if prosecutors can show a criminal intent and a "substantial step" connected with the crime, such as lying in wait for a victim, scoping out a place contemplated for the crime, or possessing materials for the crime that can serve no lawful purpose.

Rep. Maxine Grad, the chairwoman of the House Judiciary Committee, believes this language would allow police to intervene sooner, before a violent act can begin.

"We want to fill the gap in the law," Grad said. "In current law, somebody has to just about commit the crime before there can be intervention."

It's not clear which of the "substantial steps" might have applied to the Fair Haven case, had the changes been in effect when Sawyer was arrested, and Grad declined to comment on the specifics of an ongoing case.

The bill raises several legal questions, said Robert Sand, the Vermont Law School professor. He is unaware of any other state that uses a different "attempt" standard for serious violent felonies compared to other crimes, and he said the structure could cause complications at trial.

This is the most far-reaching change being considered in Montpelier, Sand said, because it would "change a fundamental approach to a whole category of offenses."

Contact April McCullum at 802-660-1863 or amccullum@freepressmedia.com. Follow her on Twitter at [@April_McCullum](https://twitter.com/April_McCullum).



RH 5/1 A1

Anger, pleas at CSJ meeting



ROBERT LAYMAN / STAFF PHOTOS

Students react during a tense meeting Monday afternoon at the College of St. Joseph's Tuttle Hall. The event was scheduled to answer concerns about the college, was postponed, then went on anyway. CSJ baseball players sat up front to show support for fired baseball coach and athletic director Robert Godlewski.

College explains how endowment lost \$4.5 million

By **GORDON DRITSCHILO**
STAFF WRITER

College of St. Joseph officials said Monday that while the announcement last week that the trustees were considering closing the school did not come completely out of the blue, they did not realize just how dire their straits were.

CSJ President Larry Jensen spoke at a campus meeting Monday and put the college's financial woes down to a combination of declining enrollment and the failure of the planned physician assistant program.

Other school officials at the meeting said they were still lacking answers to questions they had been asking for months, but outlined a multi-pronged approach to rescue the school's embattled finances.

Lisa Chalidze, the faculty representative to the board of trustees who is emerging as

See College, Page A10

an apparent leader among the college's employees, said that Jensen called a "town meeting" for faculty and staff Sept. 1, 2017, and told them the college was in financial trouble.

"We were not given any information to speak of," she said. "Just the bald statement."

Monday, Jensen offered an accounting for the evaporation of the school's \$5 million endowment, of which he said \$500,000 remained.

He said \$2.5 million was spent trying to launch a master's degree program training physicians assistants. After several years in development, that program was abandoned in 2016 after it was denied accreditation by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant.

Another \$2 million, he said, was spent covering operating losses. Jensen did not go into much more detail when pressed by members of the audience at Monday's meeting. Back in 2016, when he was president of the board of trustees as the program was scrapped, he had declined to even discuss how much the school had spent on it.

Chalidze said she knew the school had spent money on architectural drawings and upgrades to two donated buildings in Proctor — which the school has since placed on the market — that CSJ planned to use for the program.

"It turns out one of them was just chock full of asbestos," she said.

Chalidze also said payroll "rocketed" during that period. The college hired six to eight new employees for the program, according to media accounts at the time.

"The decision was made to expend that money before the program was accredited," she said.

CSJ's form 990 for 2015 — the most recent year available online — showed the college had \$1,468,612 in losses in 2014 and then of \$2,583,883 in 2015. During that time, the college was increasing its total employee compensation, salaries and benefits, from \$3,636,299 to \$4,475,214.

As the college was taking losses equal to about 15 percent of its total budget, it increased the amount it was spending on employees by more than 20 percent. Other filings show this was the second year in a row the college had made such an increase in staffing costs.

Meanwhile, enrollment took a nosedive, with college



ROBERT LAYMAN / STAFF PHOTO

Tonya Hathaway, who said she was dating fired baseball coach Bob Godlewski, stands behind members of the CSJ baseball team during a meeting on the school's future.

officials reporting only about 200 students showing up last year instead of the expected 260. Looking ahead to next year, Jensen said 95 undergraduates had registered — 10 new students and 85 returning. He said the college has 17 full-time graduate students and a total population of 164 when part-time students are factored in.

Jensen said admissions were doing "OK," with 432 applications, but that the school needed to make every effort to recruit as it looked for other ways to make money.

Chalidze said that after the September meeting, an ad hoc group of faculty and staff came together.

"We just did it," she said. "We came together. We came together to figure out how we might help."

Those efforts were frustrated, she said, by a lack

of responsiveness by the administration and the trustees. This resulted in Chalidze drafting, and about a dozen of her colleagues signing, a letter of "no confidence," calling on Jensen to resign and for the board to appoint Roger Weeden, head of the radiology program, to replace him. They delivered the letter in October.

"We don't have a union or a faculty senate," she said. "We have no formal way of doing anything. ... Those of us who did sign it, we felt we were putting ourselves at risk to some extent."

Chalidze said Weeden's leadership abilities had won him the respect of the entire campus. Numerous students came to the meeting with signs calling for Weeden's installation as president.

"I don't mean to bad-mouth Larry," she said. "He's tried hard."

The letter got a tepid response from the board, Chalidze said, so she, Weeden and others continued working on ideas to bring more money to the college. They ranged from a development plan calling for pursuing additional grants alongside donations from alumni and corporations totaling about \$1 million a year to opening a daycare on campus.

"The first thing you need to realize in higher education is higher education is not the same any more," Weeden said at Monday's meeting, explaining colleges can no longer just rely on tuition for revenue.

Other initiatives Weeden said were ready to launch included a partnership with the Boston High School to Teachers Program, an institute on the study of psychological trauma, a nursing program and selling online

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SUPPORT VERMONT MINIMUM WAGE BOOST

To The Editor:

The first federal minimum wage law was created in 1938. It's been raised 22 times since then, in addition to many state minimum wage laws. And every single time it has been resisted by business and conservative interests with the same arguments. "It would be disastrous for workers and business. It would mean lost jobs, reduced hours and it would hurt young people."

There has been quality academic research going back many decades showing that there is no significant correlation between minimum wage increases and reduced employment levels. The losses are minimal, the gains significant.

This time it's argued that businesses that employ many minimum wage workers can't afford an abrupt increase that would affect all its workers. But in Vermont, that \$4.50 an hour increase (from \$10.50 up to \$15) is hardly abrupt. It's an increase over six years.

Another argument is that it would take people off social welfare too abruptly. There is language in the minimum wage bill to address these and other various concerns.

It is, or should be, obvious that these arguments against raising minimum wage laws are inspired not by economic concerns but by ideology. "Don't interfere with business." "The welfare of workers is not our concern." "They deserve to make a meager wage and we, the ones making much more money, deserve the lowest possible prices."

It's alarming to think the price of a burger might go up a few cents or the lift ticket a few dollars. Those minimum wage earners are in many cases subsidizing the low prices "we" enjoy.

Contact your state representative and ask her or him to support raising the minimum wage. It will benefit 70,000 working Vermonters. It's time to close the gap between the haves and have-nots.

LORI CLAFFEE
Springfield, Vt.